

SHAMIRAN ISTIFAN

shamiran.istifan@gmail.com
@kafirahm

Shamiran Istifan is a visual artist based in Zurich. With a background in education and journalistic research, her art practice focuses on layered social dynamics, motivated by her personal experiences of how class, gender, and religion shape collectivism, politics, and interpersonal relationships. Through an intimate aesthetic, Istifan's work highlights the pervasive influence of symbolism in daily life. Her artwork has been exhibited in several venues across Zurich, Lausanne, London, Paris, Berlin, Basel, Dubai, and Abu Dhabi. In 2021, she received the Art Prize of the Canton of Zurich. Shamiran Istifan is currently in a studio residency with the City of Zurich.

2021
Haus Konstruktiv,
Canton Zurich Prize 2021,
Zurich

Ex Amore Vita: Ladies' Room
Video installation (screens,
soft tiles, ceramic sinks, LED,
sound, mixed materials)
4 m x 3 m (booth)
120 cm x 80 cm (each sink)



Ladies' Room captures intimate moments of women smoking, chatting, and getting ready in the sanctuary of a bathroom at a wedding venue. Rooted in the artist's childhood memories of attending weddings in the Assyrian diaspora, the piece reflects on the significance of weddings as communal rather than romantic events. For displaced Assyrians, these temporary spaces in the West provide a fleeting sense of belonging. Within this gathering, the women's bathroom becomes an even safer, more private haven—where connections flourish in an unspoken, secret celebration. Though the work represents a simple public restroom with cold lighting, white tiles, and sinks, the warmth and joy are brought to life by the women who inhabit it.

2021
Kulturfolger, Zurich

Law + Order (Double Gate)
LED lamps, plastic fibers
3 m x 4 m



Law + Order is a double gate made of LED fibers that symbolizes the threshold to another world. Accompanied by a written narrative, it echoes orally transferred stories of djinn culture and beliefs about how other dimensions intersect with our own. The gate serves as a metaphor for the “upside down” and a portal to the in-between—a space where these realms converge, evoking the mysticism and duality of unseen worlds.

2023
,The Fairest' Traumabarundkino,
Berlin

Darbuka (10 Steps)
Video installation (screen, red tulle,
wooden box, sound)
2.2 m x 1 m

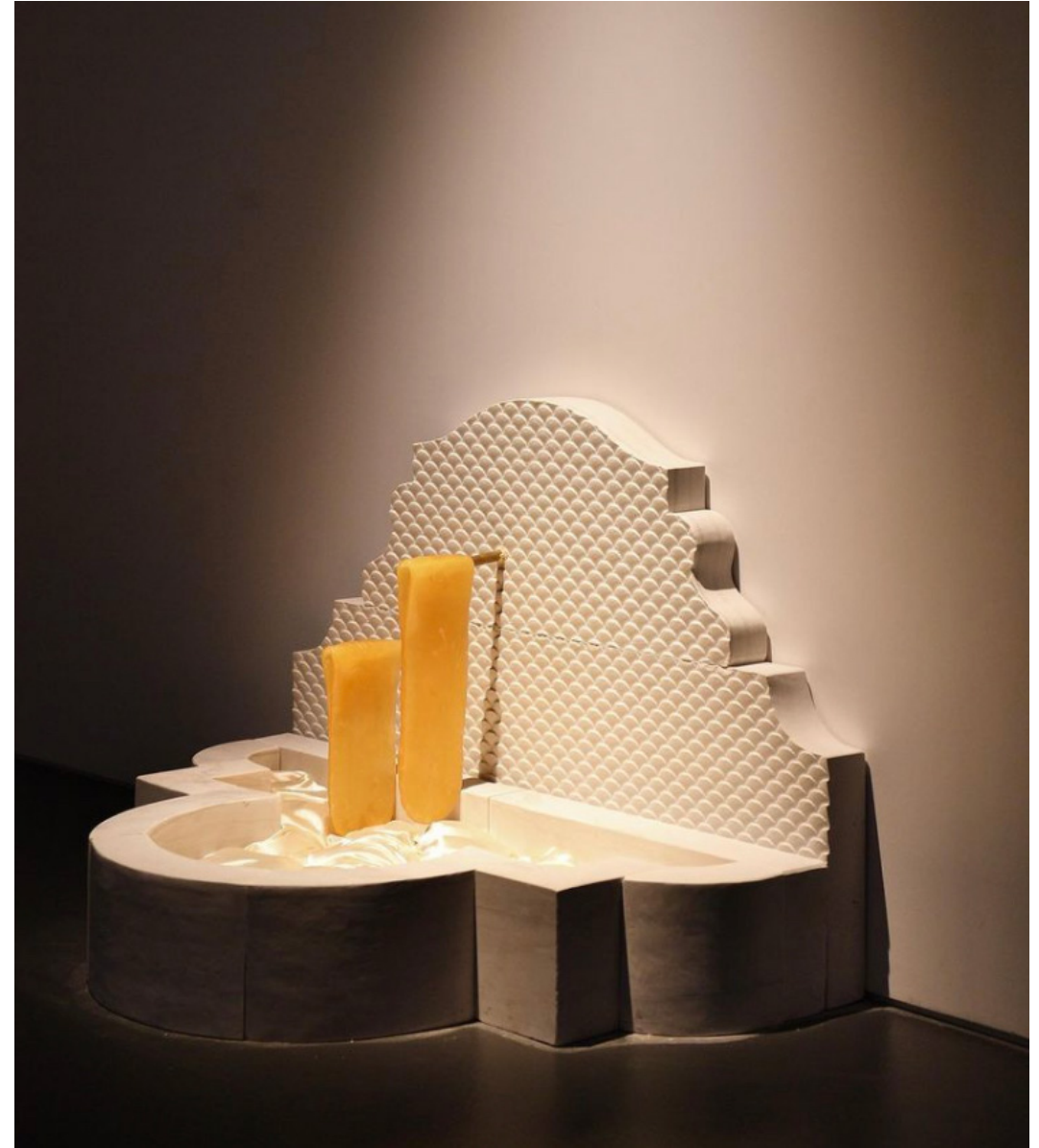


Darbuka features a bed made of red tulle with a video screen embedded in its center, displaying a half-naked darbuka player whose expression remains unreadable as he gazes directly into the camera. The rhythm of the drum aligns with sexual impulses, while on-screen titles shift through "Step 1" to "Step 10" on "How to Become a CEO," sourced from an "alpha men" online forum. The piece explores themes of masculinity, power dynamics, and the intersection of desire with modern constructs of success.

2021
Warehouse 421 Gallery,
Abu Dhabi

The Hanging Garden (Sugar Wax
Fountain)
700 kg Calacatta stone, sugar wax,
silk, wadding, poles
1.3 m x 1.1 m x 90 cm

The Hanging Garden is a sculptural fountain made of Calacatta stone, its surface adorned with snake-like scales that reference the body of Shahmaran, the mythological half-woman, half-snake figure. Shahmaran, once a revered deity before the advent of Abrahamic religions, represents the duality of femininity and nature. Both the snake and the woman, once symbols of benevolence and wisdom, were recast as figures of malevolence after the Garden of Eden. Inside, silk and soft cushions create a contrast to the stone, offering a soft, intimate space symbolizing comfort and sensuality. Hanging sugar wax pieces, used in female body-hair removal rituals, tie together ancient myth with contemporary feminine practices of care and body sovereignty.



2024

Tropez Humboldthain, Berlin

Flugblatt Nummer Vier

Fabric, print, poles

150 cm x 75 cm (each)

In the typical headliner font of the biggest newspapers of Germany's BILD Zeitung, the portrait of a woman gazes down at the bathers, with the quote „Wir sind euer böses Gewissen“ (“We are your guilty conscience”). Flugblatt Nummer Vier serves as a reminder of the White Rose resistance movement, which, led in part by the Scholl siblings, called with quotes like this one for resistance against National Socialism. The flags prompt the German public to confront uncomfortable realities and engage in (self-)reflection—bridging the past and present. The work also draws attention to the role of codes and censorship of specific colors, highlighting how media shape our power dynamics until today.



2022

Swiss Art Awards, Messe Basel

Trip to Jerusalem

Metallic jersey, wadding, thread,
linen, chairs, metallic poles, ipad
screen

3 m x 2.50 m (booth)

Trip to Jerusalem was created as part of the Swiss Art Awards nominations, with the booth adorned in metallic cushion angels, symbolizing ascension and the departure from physical space. The piece references the game "musical chairs" (known as "Trip to Jerusalem" in German), where players are gradually eliminated until one remains. In the video, six women play the game while offering personal statements, evoking a funeral-like atmosphere. Satirical elements drawn from reality TV culture, including typical cosmetic surgeries such as nose jobs to tone down ethnic features (a procedure the artist has also undergone), as a biting commentary on identity and assimilation. The work reflects on a people whose existence is sustained only through their community, exploring the fragility of cultural continuity and the eventual fading of a collective identity.





2019
Les Urbaines Arsenic, Lausanne
Curated by Deborah Joyce Holman

Teleportation Loop Player
Aluminium dish, stickers, epoxy
180 cm diameter



A large satellite dish in the exhibition space, shimmering like a shell. Satellite dishes often symbolize and serve as an involuntary flag that signifies immigrant household. This installation comments on social mobility and aspirations, particularly within the context of new money. The LV logo is altered by adding two dots, transforming its meaning in Arabic to 'bana' which means "to be evident through separation." This duality highlights the complexities of identity and belonging in a globalized world, reflecting both the pride and challenges faced by certain communities.



2023
Studio Chapple Gallery, London

A House With No Past
Metallic jersey, wadding, thread,
linen, wooden board
88 cm x 76 cm



A House With No Past explores the intimacy of love through a cushion piece depicting kissing cherubs. When two people fall in love, they often create a shared space devoid of history, a "house with no past." The artist repeatedly uses naked cherubs in boots to represent people she knows to infuse personal connections. These angels embody both innocence and a playful kinkiness, capturing the nature of intimacy and the complexities of romantic relationships.

2023

Rose Easton Gallery, London

Broken Doll, Fol-De-Rol
Latex, Make Up, wadding,
thread, linen
95 cm x 67 cm

Broken Doll, Fol-De-Rol features a cherub crafted from sewn latex in an intimate body color, subtly referencing the complexities of the duality of vulnerability and resilience. With a broken neck, this cherub tells a poignant story that echoes themes from « The Second Sex » by Simone de Beauvoir, which explores the nuances of femininity, objectification, and autonomy. The piece invites viewers to reflect on the fragility of innocence in a world that often commodifies the body, while simultaneously celebrating the strength that arises from adversity.



2022

Rose Easton Gallery, London

Maryam I, II, III

Metallic jersey, wadding, thread,
linen

95 cm x 67 cm

The three Maryam pieces are a poignant tribute to the artist's aunt and second caretaker, Maryam, who passed away in the 1990s in Switzerland. Her slow decline due to an autoimmune illness was exacerbated by a traumatic event: while living and working in Ticino, the Italian part of Switzerland, Maryam experienced a near-fatal incident when she was almost struck by a car. The involvement of the police triggered a deep fear of being discovered by the « Fremdenpolizei », forcing her to confront the precariousness of her family's situation. Maryam's sense of responsibility and concern for others, alongside the interconnectedness of political and personal struggles, left a lasting impact on the artist, who was a child at the time of her passing. Even in her illness, Maryam radiated softness, grace, and strength, qualities that inspired this dedication. Her non-physical presence during the artist's childhood serves as a haunting reminder of love and sacrifice, transforming her memory into a sanctuary of resilience and compassion.





2021

Karma Gallery International, Zurich

Abundbashmayo

Pillow case, red marker

56 cm x 37 cm

The three Maryam pieces are a poignant tribute to the artist's aunt and second caretaker, Maryam, who passed away in the 1990s in Switzerland. Her slow decline due to an autoimmune illness was exacerbated by a traumatic event: while living and working in Ticino, the Italian part of Switzerland, Maryam experienced a near-fatal incident when she was almost struck by a car. The involvement of the police triggered a deep fear of being discovered by the « Fremdenpolizei », forcing her to confront the precariousness of her family's situation. Maryam's sense of responsibility and concern for others, alongside the interconnectedness of political and personal struggles, left a lasting impact on the artist, who was a child at the time of her passing. Even in her illness, Maryam radiated softness, grace, and strength, qualities that inspired this dedication. Her non-physical presence during the artist's childhood serves as a haunting reminder of love and sacrifice, transforming her memory into a sanctuary of resilience and compassion.

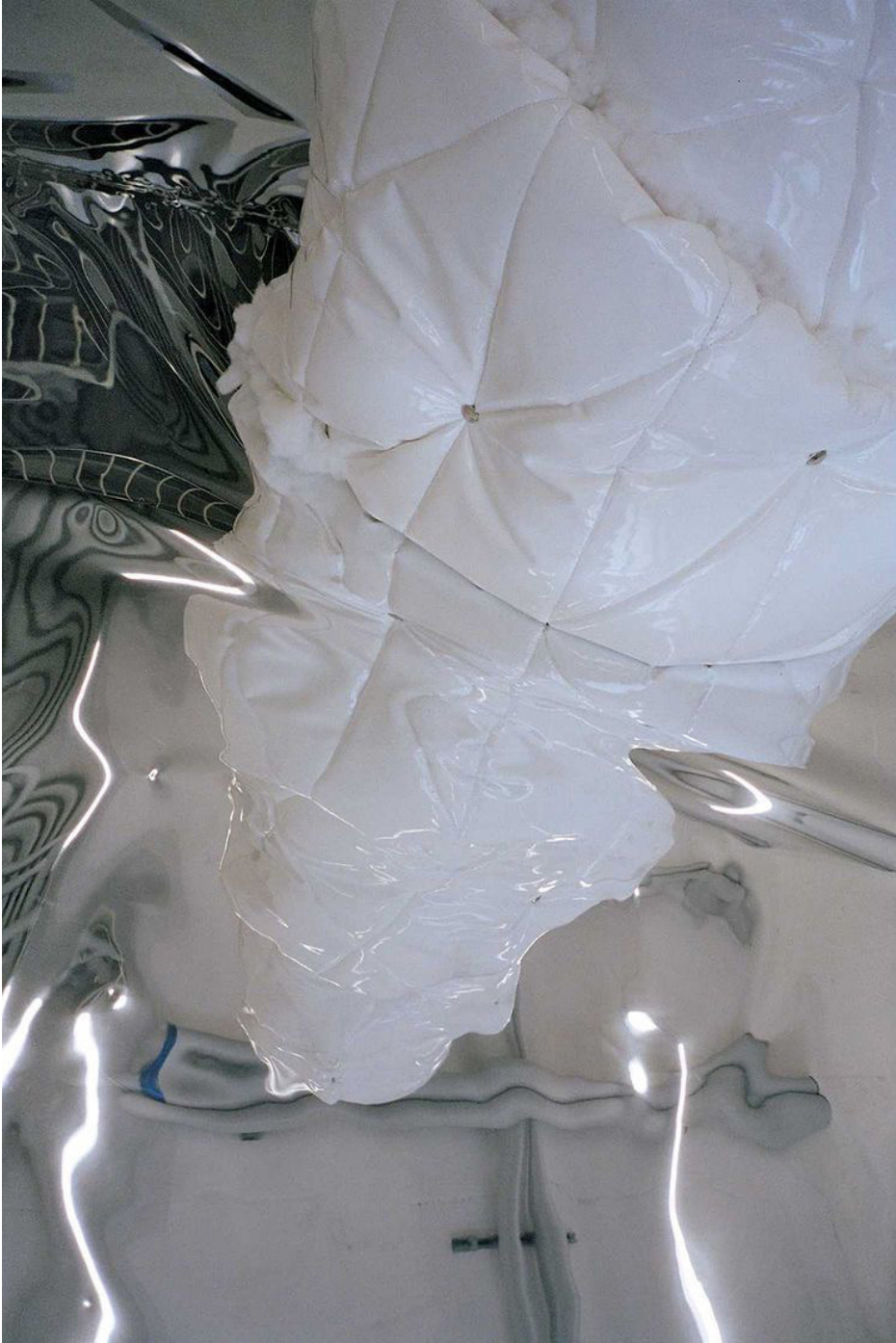


2022
All Stars, Lausanne

G by Destiny
Water optics mirror foil floor across
the exhibition space space
8 m x 5 m excl. 2 stairs

As part of the artist's solo show G by Destiny this installation features mirror foil laid throughout the space, creating an illusion of shimmering water. This same mirror foil was used at the wedding of national soccer player Haris Seferović, linking personal celebration to broader themes. The show delves into masculinity and manhood, exploring archetypes of idols, Machiavellian aspirations, and dominance through iconic pop culture references, such as Scarface. The work particularly resonates with men from geopolitically complex backgrounds, where oppression has shaped their narratives, reflecting on the interplay between power, identity, and cultural context.





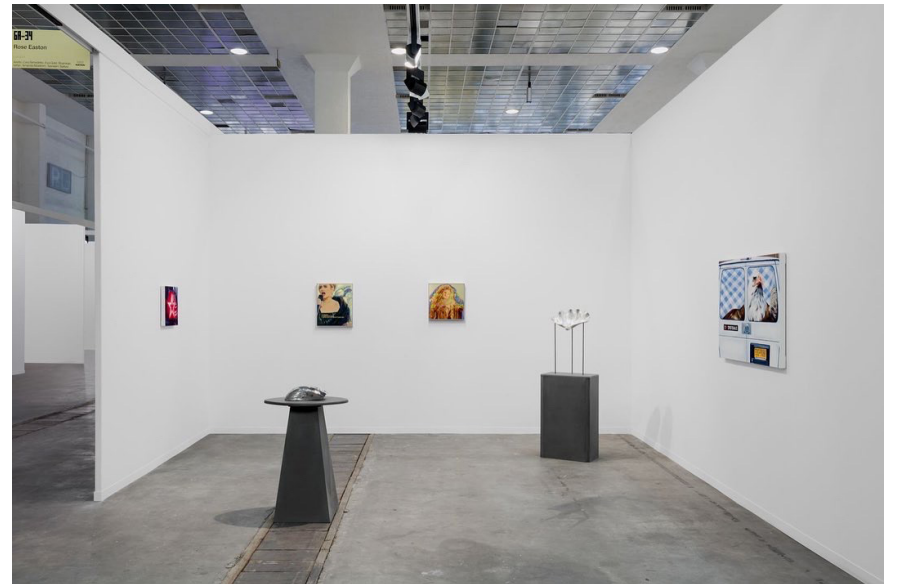
2024
Art Brussels, Rose Easton Gallery
(London)

You Kissed The Wound
Silver, copper, PLA
40 cm x 25 cm

You Kissed The Wound features a silver-plated shell inspired by ancient beauty bowls and Lebanese pop star Haifa Wehbe's song "Boos el Wawa" ("Kiss the Wound"). Originally intended as a children's song, it morphs into a seductive hymn that encapsulates the essence of Arab pop culture in the 2000s—a period marked by significant shifts in the global narrative, forever altering relationships between the Middle East and Western powers.

The shell serves as a bridge between ancient artifacts and contemporary global politics, reflecting how historical beauty ideals and modern expressions of desire intersect. This interplay invites viewers to consider the lingering effects of colonialism and cultural exchange. The piece resonates with themes explored in Edward Said's « Orientalism » which critiques the West's portrayal of the East and highlights the complexities of identity and representation in a globalized world.





2023

Engage 101 at Alserkal Avenue, Dubai

Gold Digger (x Vista in the sky)

Cut acrylic

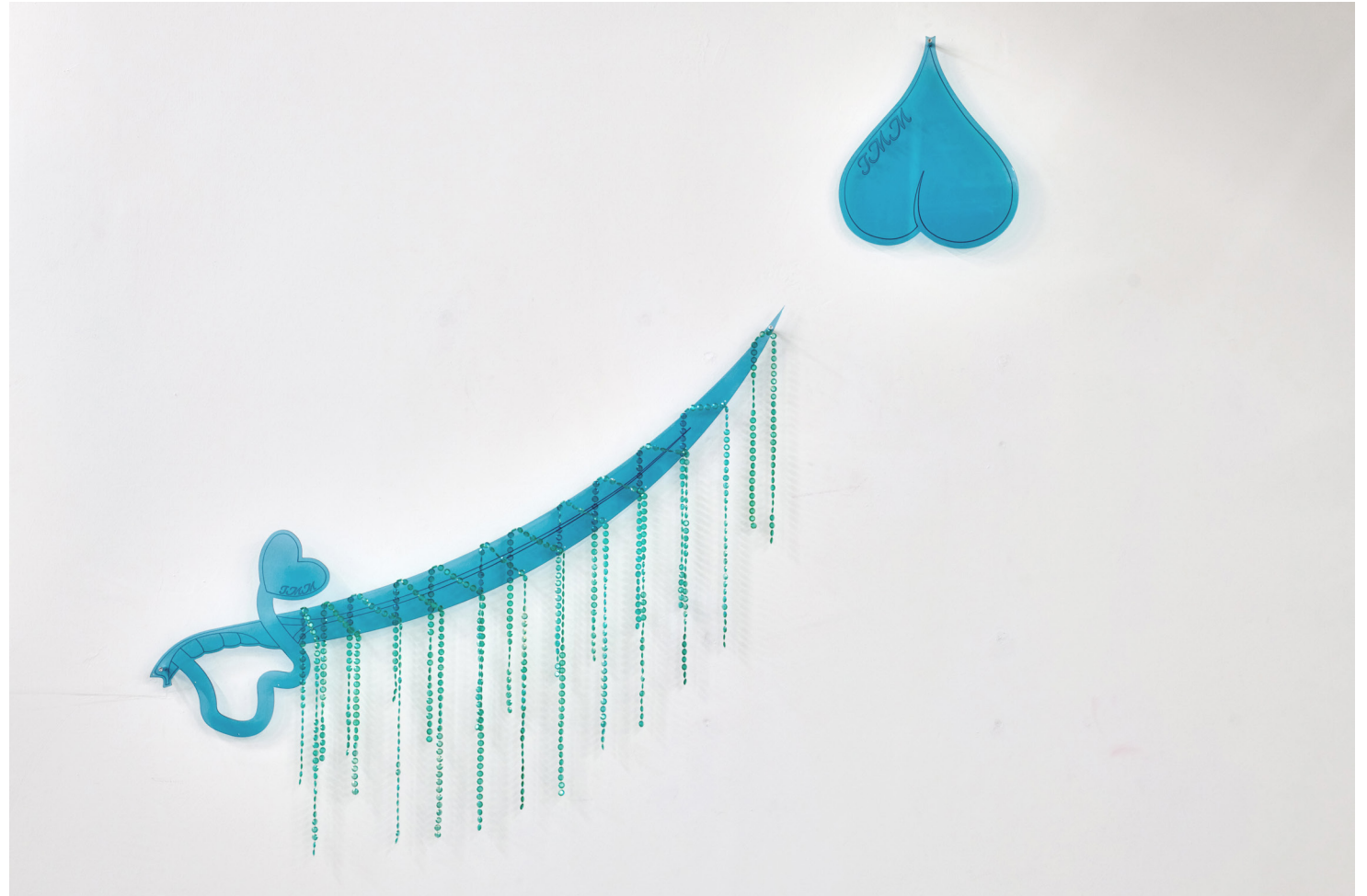
78 cm x 83 cm



Gold Digger is featured along with Ruba Al-Sweel's and Rojda Yavuz's video « Vista in the Sky ». This angelic figure embodies imagined powers and illusions while playfully pursuing earthly blessings. The piece offers a comedic critique of the stereotype of women as gold diggers, juxtaposing societal perceptions with the stark realities reflected in statistical data that reveal deeper truths about gender and economics. This work engages with themes explored in Linda Williams' essay « The Politics of the Female Body » which examines the representation of women in media and the complexities surrounding their agency and identity.

2021
Karma Gallery International, Zurich

Tamam
Cut and carved acrylic, beads
1.2 m width (together)



2022

Rose Easton Gallery, London
Chateau Royal Hotel, Berlin

Chiasm of Lovemaking (Gouriye)
Cut and carved acrylics
1.2 m width

Become Haifa
Cut and carved acrylics, 2 pieces
62 cm (together)



2023
Rose Easton Gallery, London

Power Stroke
Vinyl stickers on windows
1.4 m x 1.2 m each

The World (Sword)
Cut and carved aluminium, epoxy
68 cm

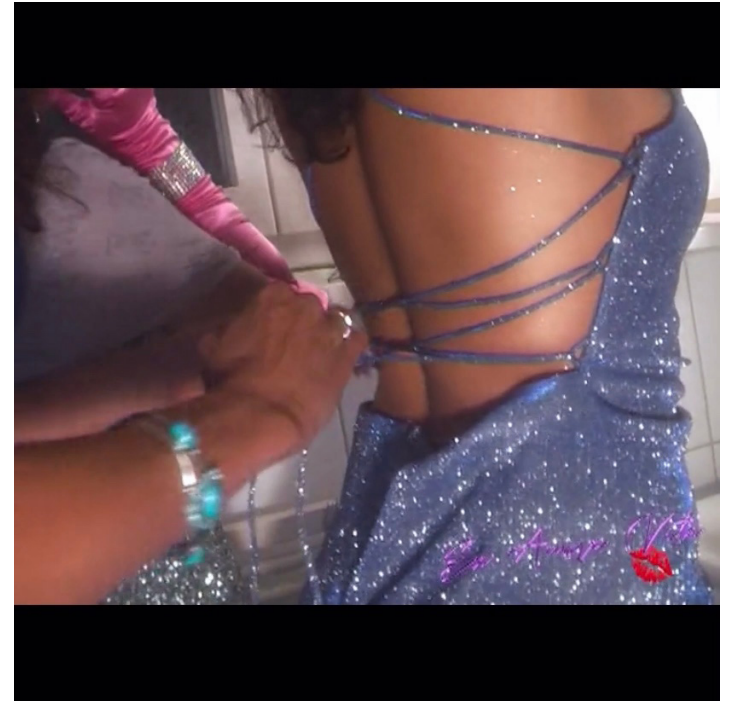
Power Stroke features vinyl stickers placed across windows, showcasing cuneiform script that reinterprets Wedekind's Spring Awakening, specifically a dialogue set in a graveyard. The installation incorporates car sticker forms of women alongside the phrase POWER STROKE connecting the historical context of oil and petrol with the ancient civilizations where these resources were abundant. This juxtaposition highlights the duality of these elements, as they are now repurposed for the care industry, war, and contemporary commodification. By invoking ancient language and modern imagery, Power Stroke critiques the intersections of power, gender, and resource exploitation, reflecting on how history informs present realities.





2020
Ex Amore Vita

4:36 min



[watch here](#)

2020
Darbuka (Armen Ohanian)

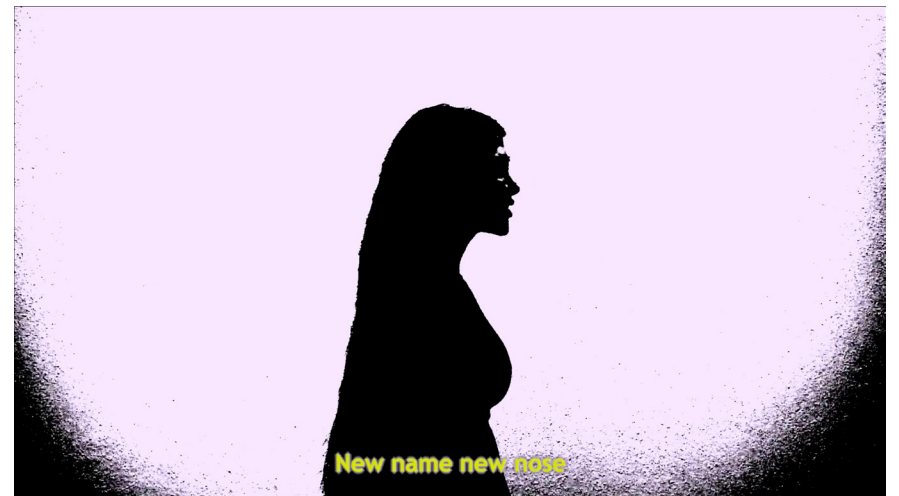
3:05 min



[watch here](#)

2022
Trip to Jerusalem

2:06 min



[watch here](#)

OTHER PROJECTS

2021
Kunsthalle Zurich

We're carrying you
Bookshelf of 20 meters
Wood, paint, stickers, synthetic feathers,
aluminium



We're Carrying You features the changed and arabized symbol of the LV sticker integrated into a 20-meter-long bookshelf, created specifically for the Kunsthalle Zurich. The shelf is adorned with a curated selection of books and magazines, inviting visitors to explore a diverse range of narratives and perspectives. The installation poses questions about authorship and selection, as the chosen works reflect a tapestry of voices that resonate with the themes of identity and cultural representation. This ambiguity invites contemplation about the nature of knowledge and how it is constructed. Inspired by the literary traditions of collective wisdom, We're Carrying You engages with the notion that every book carries a story, emphasizing the interconnectedness of our experiences and histories.

2024
Kunsthalle Zurich

Treasure of the Town: Malerbuch
A book project co-curated by Lhaga
Koondhor + Shamiran Istifan



Treasure of the Town: Malerbuch by Clubhaus presents a contribution from 80 invited artists, aimed at creating a contemporary archive for the future. This project playfully questions the notions of authorship and historical narrative, inviting reflection on the role of collective creation. The original volumes of the Malerbücher reside in the archives of Kunsthaus.

The cover is designed by the Swiss label Ottolinger, making this a unique single edition that combines artistic vision with innovative design. By bridging the past with the present, this Malerbuch seeks to redefine how we perceive and document artistic legacies.

2023
Kunsthalle Zurich

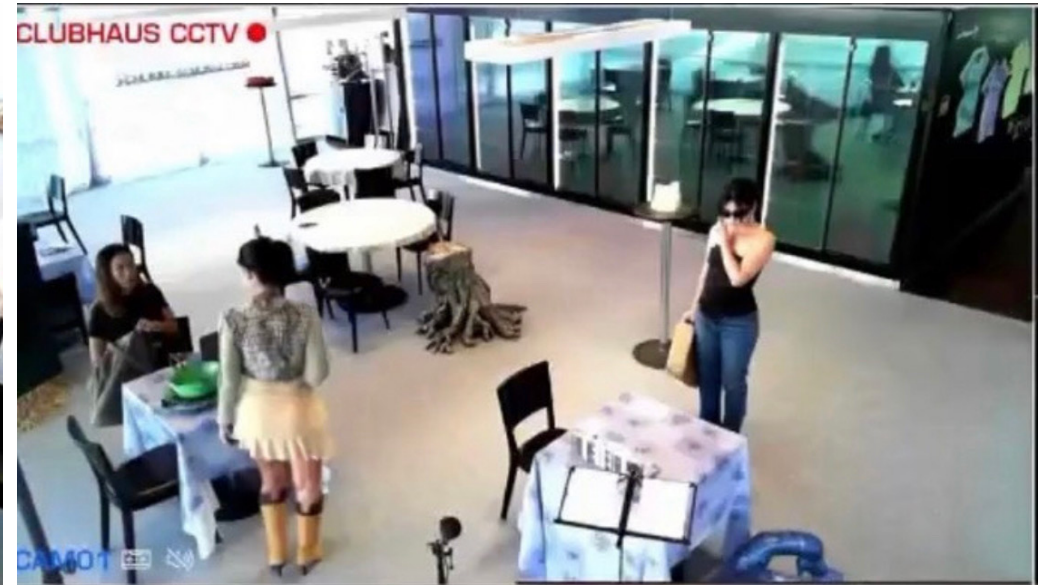
Demanding Yet Gentle I, II
Co-curated by Lhaga Koondhor +
Shamiran Istifan
Set Design by Shamiran Istifan

As part of a pop-up restaurant they managed, Istifan and Koondhor curated next to the restaurant the group show *Demanding, Yet Gentle* featuring a diverse array of artists, including Mathis Altman, Mai-Thu Perret, Sveta Mordovskaya and others. Istifan's set design comments on the concept of a "Clubhaus," drawing parallels to the origins of Kunsthaus Zurich, which began as a Kunstverein.

This installation recontextualizes hidden industrial areas from the agglomeration, bringing them to a prestigious Heimplatz in front of Kunsthaus, underscoring Istifan's commentary on access and visibility within the art world. The space evokes the atmosphere of diasporic community rooms, reflecting the artist's childhood experiences in temporary locations often repurposed from industrial settings—characterized by white lighting, grey carpets, and covered tables used for card games. White curtains mimic the ambiance of internet cafes and other communal spaces, creating a familiar yet introspective environment.

Carefully placed artworks became integral to this narrative, growing alongside the space itself. The inclusion of CCTV, reminiscent of Istifan's earlier work, offers a live stream on YouTube, further engaging with themes of surveillance and observation. This echoes concepts explored in « Camera Lucida » by Roland Barthes, which examines the relationship between viewer and subject, highlighting the complexities of presence and absence within a shared space.





Demanding, Yet Gentle



*Upcoming in Oct 2024: Hosting the Marina Abramović
Vernissage Party at Kunsthaus Zurich, CH*

Special Projects

Upcoming in Oct 2024: *Hosting the Marina Abramović Vernissage Party at Kunsthaus Zurich, CH*

Jul 2024 *Treasure of the Town: Malerbuch* at Kunsthaus Zurich, CH

Jul 2023 *Demanding, Yet Gentle: Curation group show, set design and managing a pop-up restaurant* at Kunsthaus Zurich, CH

Aug 2022 *We're carrying you: Bookshelf for Kunsthalle Zurich, CH*

Solo Shows

Upcoming in May 2025: Solo show at the Gnosienne Gallery, London, UK

Apr 2022: *Precious Pipeline* at Rose Easton – London, UK

Jul 2021: *Law & Order* at Kulturfolger – Zurich, CH

March 2021: *G by Destiny* at All Stars – Lausanne, CH

May 2020: *Micro Entities* at Material – Zurich, CH

Selected Group Shows

Jun 2024: *Malerbuch 2024* - Kunsthaus Zurich, CH

Jun 2024: *Don't Worry I Won't Forget You* at Forma Arts London, UK

May 2024: *Flugblatt Nummer Vier* at Tropez at Humboldtthain – Berlin, DE

Apr 2024: *You Kissed The Wound* at Art Brussels – Brussels, BE

Nov 2023: *Saccharine Symbols* at Rose Easton - London, UK

Oct 2023: *Zurich Biennale* at Kunsthalle Zurich - Zurich, CH

Sep 2023: *The Fairest: Get Used To This* at Kuehlhaus Berlin, DE

Jul 2023: *Kunst am Bau Window Print: Dropout Diaries* at Kantonsschule - Uitikon am See, CH

May 2023: *Gold Digger x Vista in the Sky* at Alserkal Avenue - Dubai, UAE

Mar 2 :2023 *Strong for 2 Long* at BIP Liège - Liege, BE

Feb 2023: *The Fairest: Falling Off The Earth* at Traumbarundkino - Berlin, DE

Dec 2022: *Between Two Rivers for In the Green Escape of My Palace* at Studio Chapple – London, UK

Sep 2022: *Artist Room* for Hotel Chateau Royal – Berlin, DE

Jul 2022: *City of Zurich Awards* at Helmhaus Zurich – Zurich, CH

Jun 2022: *Swiss Art Awards Nomination*

at Messe Basel – Basel, CH

Oct 2021: *As We Gaze Upon Her* at Warehouse421 – Abu Dhabi, UAE

Dec 2021: *Ex Amore Vita* at the Independent Iraqi Film Festival – Baghdad, IRQ

Oct 2021: *Ladies' Room* at Werkschau for Haus Konstruktiv – Zurich, CH

Sep 2021: *Haunted by Kings & Kovboys* at Sumac Space – Dubai, UAE

Aug 2021: *TM* at Le Consulat – Paris, FR

May 2021: *Turshi* for From Bread to Cake at The II Platform – Tehran, IRN

Feb 2021: *Tamam* for Nour el Ain at Karma Gallery International – Zurich, CH

Dez 2020: *Ex Amore Vita: A Wedding Series* at Gessnerallee – Zurich, CH

Jul 2020: *Summer of Suspense* at Kunsthalle – Zurich, CH

Dez 2019: *Teleportation Loop Player* at the Les Urbaines Festival – Lausanne, CH

CURRICULUM VITAE

Screenings

Feb 2023: Ex Amore Vita at bip Liège – Liège, BR

Aug 2022: Ex Amore Vita at After Hours – Paris, FR

Dec 2021: Ex Amore Vita at the Independent Iraqi Film Festival – Baghdad, IRQ

Jun 2021: Darbuka for 5th Floor at Centre d'Art Contemporain – Geneva, CH

Awards

2021: Werkschau Prize awarded by Kanton of Zurich for Ex Amore Vita: Ladies' Room, CH

Residency

Current -1year Studio Apartment
Residency by the City of Zurich CH

Publications

2021: *G by Destiny and Other Tales* for Artwork Magazine Issue – London, UK

2021: *Mama's Hands & Baba's Tools* for the publication of *From Bread to Cake* at The II Platform – Tehran, IRN

2020: *All You Get Back is That Fluoride Stare* – written essay contribution for Swiss Institute – New York, USA

Interviews

2023: *Elephant Magazine* – London, UK

2022: *G.O.A.T. Magazine incl. Fashion Editorial* – Los Angeles, USA

2022: *Elephant Magazine* - London UK

2021: *Azeema Magazine* – London, UK

2021: *YEOJA Magazine* – Berlin, DE

Education

2014: Bachelor of Arts in Teaching, Zurich University of Education

2020: Master of Arts in Transdisciplinarity, Zurich University of the Arts